

J Joan Cortada i Hortalà, *La filosofia de Josep Maria Capdevila* (The Philosophy of Josep Maria Capdevila), Barcelona: Publicacions de l'Abadia de Montserrat 2008

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Joan Cortada i Hortalà expresses the need for some considerations prior to readying the study of Josep Maria Capdevila. One of these refers to the clichés constructed around the personality and character of the author, clichés that he himself personally examines and assesses.

There is no doubt that he deeply disagrees with the image of Josep Maria Capdevila presented by Fuster in his *Literatura Catalana Contemporània* (Contemporary Catalan Literature). The author is annoyed not only by the book's scant references to Capdevila's work but also by the fact that, in these references, the Valencian essayist portrays an extremely caricaturised Orsian by-product. Fuster is well known for having no mercy and for calling exactly it as he sees it.

Another of the clichés revisited by Joan Cortada is that inspired by Josep Pla, who made subtle references to Capdevila in his *Homenots* dedicated to Carles Riba and Eugeni d'Ors, placing him amongst the disciples of Xènius –together with Srta. Muntaner, Crexells, Estelrich and Joan Climent– although, admittedly, he gives Capdevila a distinctive air, a different personality, a degree of complexity... Amongst Xènius's disciples, Capdevila had a “privileged” position. The cliché which, in this case, Joan Cortada looks to counter, it is that of a man of “many Orsian works, greater and lesser” who, in *El Matí*, attempted to promote a modern form of Catholicism and who interested Josep Pla enough for him to make him the subject of one his portraits, even if it was but a passport portrait.

Joan Cortada i Hortalà analyses yet another Capdevila, that of Maurici Serrahima. His biographical essay, the author acknowledges, is the one that puts

Josep Maria Capdevila in the place he belongs: “a more serious, balanced approach to his life and work”. However, Cortada does not take this line: his is no biographical work, in the style of Serrahima, but rather a genetic reconstruction, into which different points of view are fitted. The essay begins by establishing the link between the man and his work, continues by explaining the ideological world that surrounded him, with its political and social thought, and finishes with the starting point of his philosophy. In this way, everything is linked together: the readings to which Capdevila had access through his father’s library, his childhood friends in Olot, his time in Barcelona, which coincided with his joining the *Noucentista* movement headed by Eugeni d’Ors, his correspondence with intellectuals, teachers and colleagues, etc. All this, combined, had a decisive influence on his thought and on his philosophy. He was a follower of modern Thomist trends, influenced by the works of reforming Catholics such as Chesterton and Jacques Maritain.

Through his intense correspondence with his esteemed teacher Josep Maria de Garganta, we see an anxious Capdevila plagued by doubt: the Romantic readings and poetry that had marked his youth, after a certain point, were diametrically opposed to Orsian ideals. The latter stressed the need to turn to Classicism and abandon Romantic passions –the very thing that had made him an admirer of literature. Someone who was a fan of Goethe or Maragall found it difficult to accept, without internal conflict, the classical requirements set down by Ors. He confessed this to his friend and teacher Josep Maria de Garganta. It was all a question of time, of maturing. The genesis shown to us by Joan Cortada depicts a Capdevila who settles these fiery controversies with his reflections. His correspondence with Carles Riba reveals his practical side, the great interest he showed in transcending, in forming part of a collective, generational awareness. This need led to his belief that it was impossible to conceive of intellectual activity unaccompanied by action and it was in this regard that he criticised Romanticism’s dilettante attitude. Capdevila needed to go to Barcelona to seek out “objects”, he sought to get down to work, to put “ideals” into effect; and these ideals had to be “objective”, they had to have a shared, explicit validity.

We are dealing with a man who was a member of Eugeni d’Ors’s Philosophy Seminar alongside Joan Crexells and who, later, was one of the founders of the Catalan Philosophical Society; a man who headed, 1929, the journal *La paraula Cristiana* (The Christian Word), started by Carles Cardó, and who founded the *El matí*, a reformist Catholic daily he had to leave in 1934 due to political manoeuvrings by the Bishop of Barcelona. Capdevila had to overcome the contradictions by converting them into vital, integrative aspects and saw the need for action, moved by the idea of a nation along the lines of Prat de la Riba. He considered it vital to overcome a kind of localism that promoted quietism and which caused him anguish.

Joan Cortada quotes this statement by Capdevila in his essay: “since the age of fourteen, when I began writing, to this very day, I have had the (perhaps extremely rare) fortune of not having had to change my thought or my feelings”. Reading this, it would appear that there were no rectifications or regrets. Capdevila, together with Enric Jardí, stood by Ors to a degree that many were incapable of. We also know that, in his key work *Eugeni d’Ors. Etapa barcelonina* (Eugeni d’Ors, the Barcelona period), he made clear the glossarist’s megalomania. He was familiar with Ors’s personality and yes, distanced himself from him definitively, but Capdevila made no about-turn or substantial change. It is this interpretation of his break with Ors as being due to ideological disagreements that Joan Cortada i Hortalà wishes to avoid as simplistic and facile when dealing with a complex man such as Josep Maria Capdevila, with whom life, work and philosophy do not operate with breaks. When he writes, he faces up to a reality that he reviews, thinks and feels all at the same time. In the evolution of Capdevila’s thought, as presented in this essay, there are no about-turns, but rather a deployment of ever-more lucid and forceful ideas and thoughts, with fewer vacillations. It is only this genetic view presented by Cortada i Hortalà that makes it possible to understand the above statement that “since the age of fourteen, when I began writing, to this very day, I have had the (perhaps extremely rare) fortune of not having had to change my thought or my feelings”. Fuster was surely not unaware of such an affirmation.